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CONTENTS:

<i>Nature Study and Moral Culture:</i> DAVID STARR JORDAN.....	149
<i>Observations on the Relation of Physical Development to Intellectual Ability, made on the School Children of Toronto, Can.:</i> G. M. WEST.....	156
<i>A Two-headed Tortoise:</i> ERWIN HINCKLEY BARBOUR	159
<i>Some Difficulties in the Presentation of the Periodic Law:</i> F. P. VENABLE.....	160
<i>Current Notes on Physiography:—</i> <i>Hills and Plains of Southeast Louisiana; Pimpled Prairies of Louisiana; Lubbock's Scenery of Switzerland; Report of the London Geographical Congress:</i> W. M. DAVIS.....	163
<i>Current Notes on Meteorology:—</i> <i>Relative Humidity of New England; Protection from Frost; Tornados in Texas:</i> R. DEC. WARD.....	164
<i>Current Notes on Anthropology:—</i> <i>Native American Textile Art; The 'Second Column' of the Achemenidean Inscription:</i> D. G. BRINTON.....	165
<i>Scientific Notes and News:—</i> <i>Electrical Conduction at Low Temperatures; The Diminution of Consumption; General.....</i>	165
<i>University and Educational News:—</i> <i>Foreign Students in the French University; General.....</i>	169
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i> <i>The Personal Equation:</i> T. H. SAFFORD. <i>Cinnabar and Rutile in Montana:</i> M. E. WADSWORTH. <i>Pygmy Villages discovered in the Interior of Surinam, Guiana:</i> R. G. HALIBURTON.....	170
<i>Scientific Literature:—</i> <i>Von Wastelewski's Sporozoenkunde:</i> CH. WARDELL STILES. <i>Report of the Government Entomologist of the Cape of Good Hope; Tenth Annual Report of the New York State Entomologist:</i> L. O. H. RIBOT's <i>Psychologie des sentiments:</i> HIRAM M. STANLEY	171
<i>Scientific Journals:—</i> <i>The American Chemical Journal:</i> J. ELLIOTT GILPIN. <i>The Auk</i>	174
<i>New Books.....</i>	176

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NATURE STUDY AND MORAL CULTURE.*

IN making a plea for nature study as a means of moral culture I do not wish to make an over-statement, nor to claim for such study any occult or exclusive power. It is not for us to say, so much nature in the schools, so much virtue in the scholars. The character of the teacher is a factor which must always be counted in. But the best teacher is the one that comes nearest to nature, the one who is most effective in developing individual wisdom. To seek knowledge is better than to have knowledge.

The essence of character building lies in action. Precepts of virtue are useless unless they are built into life. At birth or before, "the gate of gifts is closed." It is the art of life, out of variant and contradictory materials passed down to us from our ancestors, to build up a coherent and effective individual character. Character building is action, not imitation. The chief value of nature study in character building is that, like life itself, it deals with realities. The experience of living is of itself a form of nature study. One must, in life, make his own observations, frame his own inductions, and apply them in action as he goes along. The habit of finding out the best thing to do next and then doing it is the basis of character. A strong character is built up by doing, not by imitation, nor

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